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MOSAIC: PERSONIFICATION OF THE RIVER TIGRIS
ROMAN (FROM SELEUCIA PIERIA, SYRIA)
SECOND OR THIRD CENTURY A. D.

Gift of the Founders Society, 1940

A MOSAIC FROM SELEUCIA PIERIA IN SYRIA

THE Detroit Institute of Arts has been fortunate in the recent acquisition, through the Founders Society, of a second or third century mosaic¹, representing the personification of the river Tigris, secured from recent excavations at Seleucia Pieria, the ancient port of Antioch-on-the-Orontes in Syria.

On a hillside in the upper city of Seleucia Pieria, located on the coast of Syria, twelve miles from Antioch and about four miles north of the mouth of the river Orontes, looking out over the harbor and the Mediterranean Sea, stood a Roman villa, whose owner at some time toward the end of the second century or a little later decorated the triclinium or dining room with a well executed mosaic flooring, composed after the current mode of several panels united by geometric patterns and enframements, the figured portions being so arranged that they were visible to those reclining on the banqueting couches which stood over the geometric designs. This can be seen in the photograph of the flooring still in place.

When discovered in August 1937, much of the floor had been destroyed, largely by erosion, leaving only a portion of the central subject and two of the four corners. The central panel apparently represented the personifications of several ancient Roman provinces; certainly Cilicia, the inscribed figure of which survived, and probably Mesopotamia, Syria, and Babylonia, with corresponding personifications of four rivers in the corners, Pyramos (which is located in Cilicia), Tigris, Orontes, and Euphrates, of which only two remained, the youthful male bust of the river Pyramos² (now in the Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, Massachusetts), and the elderly male bust inscribed Tigris (just acquired by our Museum). Both these figures have leaves in their hair, a convention suggesting not only the vegetation of the river banks but also the crops produced by the nourishing waters and fertilizing floods.

It is interesting to observe the manner in which the mosaic artist, employing rather large cubes of colored stone (no glass), has achieved not only a naturalistic result, characteristic of the late Hellenistic style before it succumbed to Oriental formalism, but also a brilliance of color akin to the effect produced by the nineteenth century Impressionists who juxtaposed colors on their canvases to be mixed with greater brilliance in the eye of the spectator. Although employing conventions of drawing necessitated by the mosaic technique, the artist has given his figure great plasticity by means of strong color contrasts which place the face and chest in the light and the neck in the shade. White, black, red, olive-green, and grey, buff and related shades of rose and lavender, are the major colors used.

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MOSAIC: PERSONIFICATION OF THE RIVER TIGRIS
IN ITS ORIGINAL LOCATION IN A ROMAN VILLA
AT SELEUCIA PIERIA, SYRIA

This mosaic presents further interest in its subject matter. Such personifications of nature and local geographical features became common in Greek art during the Hellenistic Age, found great popularity throughout the Roman Empire, and persisted even in the art of the Early Christians, as the old gods of Greece and the Romans gave way to the new gods and the new religions of the Hellenistic Age.

The city of Antioch was a product of the Hellenistic Age. It and Seleucia Pieria were founded in 300 B.C. by Seleucus Nicator, a Macedonian cavalry leader and follower of Alexander the Great, who established a dynasty of rulers in Syria. Greek, Roman, Byzantine, and finally succumbing to successive conquests of the Persians, Arabs, and Turks, the city was never out of touch with the East and its art showed the impact of ancient Greek tradition, mingled with influences from other Hellenized cities like Alexandria, Constantinople, and Rome, and the love of color and formal rhythmic pattern which characterized the art of the Near East.

Until recently, the study of Antiochene art was based almost wholly upon speculation. In 1932, however, active work of excavation was begun on the ancient sites of the Antioch region by an expedition conducted by Princeton University, with the collaboration of the Musées Nationaux de France, the Worcester Art Museum, and the Baltimore Museum of Art, and, in later campaigns, the Fogg Museum of Art at Harvard University, affiliated with Dumbarton Oaks (the collection of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Woods Bliss). The successive campaigns of this expedition, continued until recently, have vastly increased our knowledge of the

topography of Antioch, Daphne, its nearby residential suburb and religious center, and Seleucia Pieria, its port. Most important among the finds are the hundreds of mosaic pavements, pictorial and geometric, many of them accurately dated by coins found above and below them, which make such a notable series of monuments for the study of ancient painting¹.

From many points of view, the new acquisition is then of interest and importance. It is a noteworthy technical achievement, an enjoyable work of art, a subject which throws light upon Hellenistic thought, and a document of ancient history.

FRANCIS W. ROBINSON

¹Accession number: 40.127. Dimensions: whole, 56½ inches by 56½ inches; main subject, 42½ inches square. Acquired from the Committee for the Excavation of Antioch and Vicinity. Gift of the Detroit Museum of Art Founders Society, 1940.

²E. H. P. (Elizabeth H. Payne), "A Mosaic from the Antioch Region," *Bulletin of Smith College Museum of Art*, No. 20, June 1939, pp. 10-16.

³For a brief but illuminating study of Antioch, its history and art, see C. R. Morey, *The Mosaics of Antioch*, New York (Longmans, Green & Co.), 1938.

INDONESIAN TEXTILES

THANKS to gifts by friends of the Textile Department, the collection has been enriched by specimens which represent two of the native Malay types of decorating a woven fabric.

Mrs. Lillian Henkel Haass has presented a panel of painted cotton cloth, typical of the eighteenth century art of the island of Bali¹. It is a strip of *langse*, wide cloth used for curtains and hangings. In three horizontal rows there are painted scenes from the *Bharata Yuddha* which, originally part of the heterogeneous mass of legendary matter of the *Mahabharata*, the great epic poem of the Hindus, has become the national epic of Insulinde. The characters, princes and princesses with their retainers, wear the ancient costumes of the classical Hindu-Javanese period which came to an end about the middle of the fifteenth century.

Characteristic for Bali is the *horror vacui* which led the painter to cover any space left blank by the design with a conventional cloud pattern, and the presentation of the figures in three-quarter face, never in profile as in paintings from Java. Obviously the Javanese painter depends on the *wayang*, the shadow puppet forms, while his Balinese confrere is a true artist.

On the cloth starched and polished with a smooth shell, a preliminary outline is drawn with a bamboo pen dipped in ochre. The colors are applied with brushes made of bamboo sticks with loosened fibres. Five pigments are used: red, compounded of Chinese vermillion; blue, a vegetable indigo; yellow, a mineral ochre; black, soot mixed with vegetable juices and white, obtained from calcinated pigs' bones. For green, ochre and indigo is mixed, for tan, soot is added to vermillion. The design is finished with black outlines sharply traced with the bamboo pen; again the cloth is glossed with the smooth shell and the picture is finished.



TEXTILE: SCENES FROM THE BHARATA YUDDHA (Detail)
ISLAND OF BALI, EIGHTEENTH CENTURY
Gift of Mrs. Lillian Henkel Haass, 1940

Bali is one of the smaller islands of the Malay archipelago; Java, one of the largest. Mrs. Cola de Joncheere Heiden has presented a specimen typical of Javanese weaving¹. Into a loosely woven unbleached muslin, heavier cotton threads of blue and red are floated, to give a clear pattern on both sides. Most of the design is geometric, an intricate fretwork filled with diamonds, but on each side there emerge snakes and strangely stylized human figures.

The two pieces mark a new departure of the Textile Department. To present a complete picture of the beautiful craft of the Malay weavers, specimens of the diverse other techniques will have to be added, notably batiks from Java and double ikats from Bali. This is a pleasant dream for the near future.

ADELE COULIN WEIBEL

¹Accession number: 40.35. Length: 63½ inches; Width: 64 inches.

²Accession number: 40.137. Length: 34 inches; Width: 31 inches.

THREE CONTEMPORARY AMERICANS

THE American collection has received as the gift of an anonymous donor three paintings by contemporary artists, *Leaf Series, Number One* by Carl Ruggles, *In Hoboken* by Reginald Marsh, and *Kohl-Rabi Roots* by Clay Bartlett.

As those who know our collection are aware, we have a small group of the paintings and drawings of Carl Ruggles. He is more widely known as one of the most distinguished of living American composers. Since 1932 he has also been

working in color and black-and-white. He brings to his painting not only a highly developed musical sense of style but a very interesting creative mind. During the past season he was deeply interested in making studies of drying leaves. The strange and intricate shapes which leaves take on from the tensions of drying appealed both to his musician's sense of rhythmic development of line and to the sense of mystery and poetry which is characteristic of his art. The museum was fortunate to acquire the first of the series of leaf studies made during the past year.

The landscape in water color, *In Hoboken*, by Reginald Marsh, is also one of his most recent works. It expresses his feeling for the city landscape of the Hudson's shores in and around New York City, and achieves a simplicity and unity of tone that, we believe, shows Marsh at his best.

Clay Bartlett is a younger painter, who lives in Manchester, Vermont, and whose work is marked especially by a highly personal and effective language of color, of which the small still-life is an excellent example.

E. P. RICHARDSON



EUROPA AND THE BULL
BY DARREL AUSTIN, AMERICAN, 1907-
Acquired through the William H. Murphy Fund, 1940

Museum Notes

PLANS are now under way for several exhibitions of unusual interest and variety to take place at the Museum and at Alger House during the earlier part of 1941. For the month of January the Museum is hoping to show a representative and important group of paintings from the permanent collection of the New York Museum of Modern Art, to be followed by a similar exhibition in late February and throughout March of about sixty American paintings from the Whitney Museum in New York.

At Alger House an exhibition of Ballet Designs is scheduled for January, and during February a show of Industrial Art, consisting of useful objects priced under ten dollars. Both exhibitions are circulated by the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Arrangements are also in progress for a later exhibition at Alger House in the Spring of important 19th and 20th Century French drawings from the celebrated collection of the Fogg Museum of Art at Harvard University.

From the highly successful loan exhibition of paintings and drawings by the talented young Oregon painter, Darrel Austin, which has just closed at Alger House, the Museum has been fortunate in acquiring through the William H. Murphy Fund his most important recent canvas, representing *Europa and the Bull*, a work charged with mysticism in the romantic tradition and handled with great originality and unusual imagination.

Calendar Of Events For December

EXHIBITIONS

Through December 17: *Annual Exhibition for Michigan Artists*.

Through December 15: *Japanese Colored Wood Block Prints from the Collection of Mr. Raymond A. Bidwell of Springfield, Massachusetts*.

December 3 through December 31: *"Fifty American Prints" from the American National Committee of Engraving*. (Alger House.)

TUESDAY EVENING LECTURES

Given by the museum staff in cooperation with the Archaeological Society of Detroit and the Detroit Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, Tuesday evenings at 8:30 in the lecture hall of the Art Institute. Admission free.

December 3: *Colored Wood Block Prints of Japan*, by Isabel Weadock, Curator of Prints.

SUNDAY AFTERNOON LECTURES

Given at 2:30 in the galleries, where chairs are provided.

December 1: *Michigan Arts and Crafts*, by John D. Morse.

December 8: *Jan Van Eyck*, by Joyce Black Gnau.

December 15: *The Madonna in Art*, by Marion Leland Heath.

December 22: *Beginnings of Christian Art*, by John D. Morse.

December 29: *Colonial Furniture*, by Joyce Black Gnau.

RADIO TALKS

A series of radio talks by John D. Morse on *The Human Side of Art* will be given each Saturday evening over Station WWJ at 7:45 P. M. throughout December.

HOURS OF ADMISSION

The Detroit Institute of Arts, 5200 Woodward Avenue at Kirby, is open free daily except Mondays and Christmas Day. Visiting hours: Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday, 1 to 5 and 7 to 10; Wednesday, 1 to 5; Saturday, 9 to 5; Sunday, 2 to 6. The Alger House Museum, 32 Lake Shore Road, Grosse Pointe Farms, a branch museum for Italian Renaissance Art and temporary exhibitions, is open free daily except Mondays from 1 to 5. Telephones: Detroit Institute of Arts, COLUMBIA 0360; Alger House Museum, TUxedo 2-3888; Detroit Museum of Art Founders Society, COLUMBIA 4274.

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